

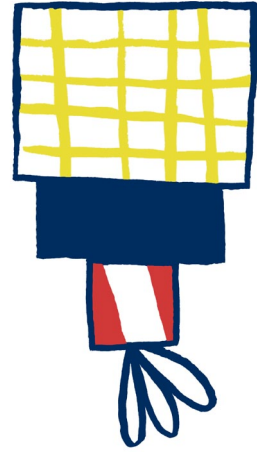


A PROMISE OF MAGIC !



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The golden sleigh glitters, the bag overflows with gifts
 and the reindeer are hitched up.
 The elves scold each other in their excitement !
 And Father Christmas? Well, he's dog-tired !

"Here we go! It's time !"

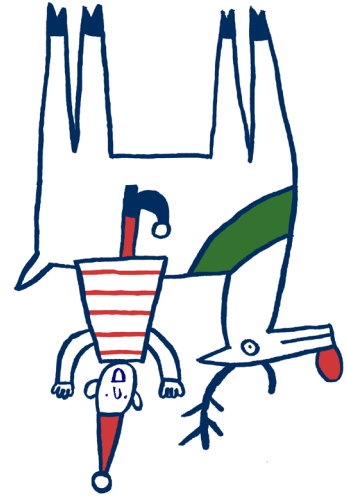
A PROMISE OF MAGIC !



He had been preparing for almost a year. A year of reading letters from children, making presents, taking care of his reindeer. And tonight, while children waited breathlessly, he would fly around the world to put gifts under every Christmas tree. Of course, he loved it! He had prepared a heaping handful of magic dust, a miraculous powder that made the reindeer fly.

But Father Christmas was concerned.

While it snowed in Lapland and in Turkey, and it was sunny in Canberra and in Goa, it was raining cats and dogs in Florence... and in France !
 And, even with the power of magic, rain is just a nuisance !

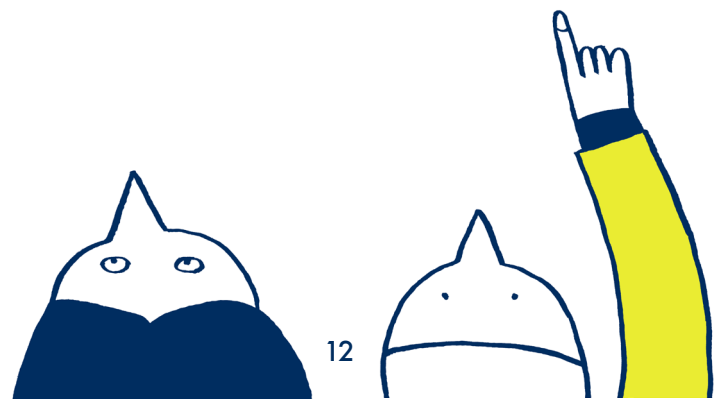


And therein lies the magic of the season, with all its
 sweetness and joy. A bit of mischief and daydreaming
 doesn't scare off Father Christmas! And as for golden
 kittens, he always knows where to find them !

The little kitten, glittering gold, meowing mightily ! But
 how could Father Christmas have known ?

And guess what Paul found in the most beautiful box of
 all ?

The next morning, by the chimney, all the family greeted
 each other with a kiss, still in their pyjamas !
 They opened their presents as sunlight streamed through
 the windows.





At that same moment, a little boy tossed and turned on his bed, unable to sleep. Rain drummed against his window, and he felt uneasy. He was only six, but he was already full of questions.

What if Father Christmas wasn't coming ?

Paul had been naughty more than once that year. Oh, nothing too serious... he had lost the keys his father had given him. He had spilled his mum's perfume on the chesterfield, and she got cross. He had also drawn on his sister Chloe's maths homework. But he didn't do any of it on purpose !

What if that was the reason it was raining ?

What if Father Christmas was angry ?

At this thought, Paul felt his eyes well up. He went into Chloe's room to wake her up. Chloe was 16, and she always made him feel better. He could see that she wasn't asleep either. But why ?

- I don't know how mum and dad can sleep, she said to him, with all this rain, and lightning, and thunder ! But you should be asleep, what's wrong, ducky ? (Chloe always called him "ducky," and Paul liked it.)

- I'm afraid I won't get any presents tonight, and that Father Christmas forgot me... I drew all over your maths homework, remember ?

- Don't worry, ducky, that's forgiven and forgotten !

Paul and Chloe heard the chime of jingle bells. Next, they were gobsmacked to see Father Christmas's golden sleigh! And the rain stopped, and it was as bright as a summer's day !

The stars glowed like the Northern Lights in the magical night.

Wide-eyed, Paul and Chloe watched the sleigh land in the illuminated garden.

- Oh, Father Christmas, you haven't forgotten me !

- Ho ho ho, how could I, when you have such a big heart? And your sister Chloe too! But children, it's quite late, you should be asleep !

- But I forgot to keep a promise !

- There now, don't you worry your little head about that. Now, off to bed, you two !

The reindeer's bells jingled, and the children yawned, suddenly very sleepy. By the time they wished each other good night, Father Christmas had vanished.

Paul had wished for an electric car, crayons, and an action figure. His heart light, he fell asleep to dream of his gifts.





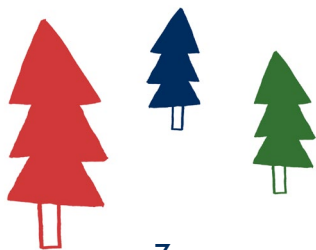
I'm sure you'll get a gift. Father Christmas knows perfectly well that you are a funny little fellow and that you don't say too many bad words. What's most important to him is that you are a nice boy ! And, that you keep your promises. So, off to bed, he won't be long now.

But Paul felt tears prick his eyes again. Chloe had just said that he must keep his promises. And there was the trouble...

- Chloe, there's just one promise that I forgot...
- Go to bed now, it's after midnight !
- It can't wait, help me, please !

Chloe loved her little brother and could never say no to him. She got dressed, put on her raincoat and followed him out into the wet night.

- Where are you taking me, ducky ?



At that very moment, in the leaden sky, Father Christmas' sleigh was approaching the house. He thought he must have gotten lost, for not a light, nor a soul could he see!
Then, all of a sudden, millions of stars appeared to guide him through the heavy clouds. They knew where all the good children lived.



- The kitten? What kitten ?

- Chloe, I've been so naughty ! I forgot the kitten, and my promise !

Oh dear, the box had almost fallen apart, and the kitten had disappeared !

But Paul didn't reply. He led her into the garden, behind the house. There, under the bench, he had hidden a kitten. He had found it earlier that day and had *promised* to keep it warm and dry. But with all this rain, the little cat would be soaked to the skin...

